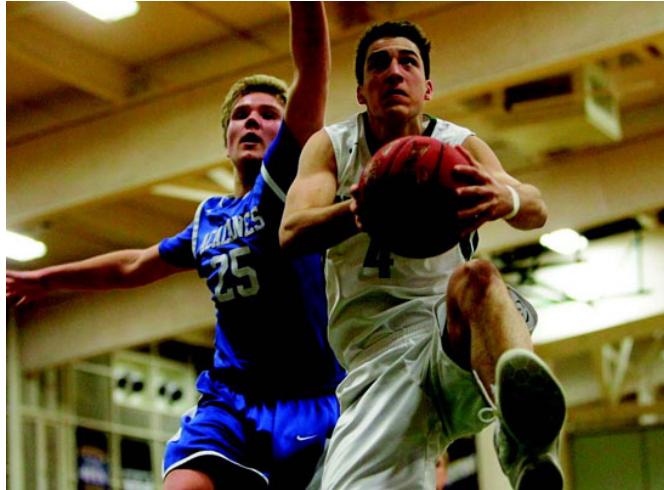


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Boys' Basketball: High Hopes, but Work to do as DFAL Play Begins

By Karl Buscheck



University of Oregon commit Eddy Ionescu (4) leads the Mats' offense. Photo Gint Federas

Smith said. "But for me, I'm just looking for consistency from my team right now. We've had a lot of games - injuries kind of hurt us a little bit - we let a lot of games go that I feel we should have won if we showed up."

In the third quarter, the Mats cut the deficit to just three points, after senior Ryan Anderson stole the ball in transition and slammed home the dunk, but Miramonte never managed to level the score - much less grab a lead.

"They came with focus and energy," Smith said of his players. "That was the difference in this game."

Drew McDonald, the head coach of the Mats, echoed that sentiment, praising the performance of the hosts when asked to explain what the missing ingredient was for Miramonte.

"They were much tougher than we were," McDonald said. "They're a mentally tougher team than we are right now in the season."

Campolindo was also far more dangerous from beyond the arc - that was especially true for captain Austin Clark who was playing at less than 100 percent.

"Austin is on limited minutes. A minutes restriction (because of) a bad injury," Smith said of the senior forward, who sank a pair of fourth-quarter threes to foil Miramonte's late charge. "I wasn't going to let him play, but he's a fire guy. He's a leader on the team."

As Campolindo embarks upon the league campaign, the focus isn't on reaching a certain win total or advancing to a specific stage in the postseason, but rather on playing up to a simple motto.

"Consistency and effort. Those are the two things I think I need to see from these guys," Smith

Rivalry games highlighted week one of the DFAL boys' basketball slate. On Jan. 8 in Moraga, Campolindo took down Miramonte 65-55 thanks to a double-double from senior center Sterling Strothers and some lights-out fourth-quarter shooting from one Cougar who wasn't even supposed to be on the court.

Following the team's 65-56 loss to Las Lomas on Jan. 5, the win over the Mats evened Campo's league mark at 1-1. The team pushed its overall record to 7-8 a day later by beating St. Mary's of Stockton 57-48 at home.

The win against Miramonte also gives the Cougars temporary bragging rights over their neighbor, which always means something extra for the players.

"I think it does for the team," head coach Kearey

Smith said. "But for me, I'm just looking for consistency from my team right now. We've had a lot of games - injuries kind of hurt us a little bit - we let a lot of games go that I feel we should have won if we showed up."

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"Consistency and effort. Those are the two things I think I need to see from these guys," Smith

said. "Everything else will take care of itself, but if we get consistency and effort, I feel the team will have an awesome opportunity and hopefully we can go deep in DFAL."

The Mats (11-5 overall, 1-1 in league) also have intentions of angling for the DFAL crown, but the setback against Campo served as a reminder that there is plenty that needs to be improved.

"We are hoping to compete for a league title," McDonald said. "I think that this team is a work in progress. We have growth to do in front of us and that's the challenge for us - we need to grow."

While the team's first week of DFAL action ended on a disappointing note, the league opener on Jan. 5 couldn't have been more promising. With senior and Oregon commit Eddy Ionescu leading the way, the Mats smashed past Acalanes 77-41 at home. That clash gave the Dons a first-hand look at just how challenging it will be to contend for the top spot in league.

"We have high expectations and our goal always is to try and win league," head coach Dave Goldman said. "So, whether that's realistic right after losing by 36 points to Miramonte or not, time will tell."

The Dons rebounded from that dud by getting past Las Lomas 59-46 on Jan. 8. The win leaves Acalanes at 1-1 in DFAL and at an 8-8 overall. As Goldman explained, the Dons will be aiming to take the role of DFAL underdog.

"We're not a real deep team," Goldman admitted. "And our key is we have to play strong, aggressive (and) follow our game plan. We're a team that does not necessarily have the best basketball players or the best athletes night in and night out. So, we have to continually have a good game plan and players have to follow that game plan to win games."



Tom Caprio (5), Sterling Strother (44), Ryan Andersen (10) and James Rickson (5) Photos Gint Federas



Nick Price (11) drives to the basket.

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